

**SUMMARY OF THE
ON-SITE ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE MEETING
JANUARY 5, 2001**

The On-site Assessment Committee of the National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Conference (NELAC) met by teleconference on Friday, January 5, 2001, at 1:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time (EST). The meeting was led by its chair, Mr. William Ingersoll of the U.S. Navy. A list of action items resulting from the meeting is given in Attachment A. A list of participants is given in Attachment B. *The purpose of the meeting was to address items of importance as summarized in the previously distributed meeting agenda.*

INTRODUCTION

After a welcome of participants, Mr. Ingersoll confirmed that everyone had received proposed language changes to Chapters 3 and 6 of the NELAC Standard prepared by Ms. Rosanna Buhl and distributed electronically prior to the meeting. He noted that Ms. Buhl would be unable to participate in the teleconference. He also noted that a redline/strikeout version of Chapter 3 had also been distributed for committee review.

While waiting for all committee members to assemble and to access the documents, Mr. Ingersoll asked Mr. Jack Hall for an update on the status of Appendix B to Chapter 3. Mr. Hall responded that he had distributed the most recent revision of Appendices B-1 and B-2 to committee members on December 20, 2000. Since several committee members were unable to locate the documents, Mr. Ingersoll asked Mr. Hall to distribute them again as e-mail attachments.

THE VALUE OF NELAP ACCREDITATION

Mr. Alfredo Sotomayor informed the committee that the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has decided not to pursue National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program (NELAP) accreditation during this legislative session. Mr. Sotomayor noted that the primary reason for this decision is that a group of Wisconsin stakeholders, mainly commercial laboratories, objected to a proposed rule that they felt would have put them at a competitive disadvantage. He cited uncertainty about the future of the national program as a secondary reason for the decision.

In subsequent discussion of this issue, Mr. Richard Sheibley noted that the state of Pennsylvania is in the process of trying to move comprehensive legislation along. He noted that the commercial laboratories' viewpoint is that NELAC requirements are onerous and that the laboratories question the advantage of NELAP accreditation. Mr. Sheibley suggested that laboratories are not fundamentally opposed to accreditation, but asking the question, "What value does the laboratory get from the accreditation program?"

In subsequent discussion it was suggested that a two-tiered accreditation process is acceptable until such time that NELAC can demonstrate that it can offer a benefit to the laboratory and data-user communities. It was suggested that NELAC is in a transition mode, which may last as long as five to

ten years, and that eventually lines between programs will blur and more states will join as accrediting authorities. Some committee members suggested that a single universal standard defines true reciprocity and that this reciprocity is the true benefit of NELAC. Other committee members suggested that when the data-user community requires NELAC, more states will buy in as accrediting authorities. Ms. Marlene Moore informed the committee of a recent telephone audit of a laboratory by the data-user. She cited this new experience as an example of ways in which NELAC requirements may be partially met in a more cost-effective manner.

REVIEW OF RECOMMENDED LANGUAGE FOR CHAPTER 3

There was moderate discussion of Ms. Buhl's proposed language changes to Chapter 3, most notably in the area of credentials for assessors and about whether the committee wants to make qualification distinctions between lead assessors and other members of the assessment team. Mr. Ingersoll suggested e-mailing requests for clarification on the Chapter 3 changes to Ms. Buhl and moving on to discuss the changes to Chapter 6. This met with agreement from the committee.

REVIEW OF RECOMMENDED LANGUAGE FOR CHAPTER 6

Noting that the deadline for submitting proposed changes to other NELAC committees is January 19, Mr. Ingersoll directed the committee's attention to Ms. Buhl's recommended language for consideration by the NELAC Accrediting Authority (Chapter 6) Committee. In her absence the committee summarized the proposed changes as an attempt to promote more consistency by ensuring that assessor training, experience, and qualification issues are reviewed during the review of the applicant accrediting authority by the NELAP assessment team. The proposed changes were viewed as an attempt to call out more of the assessor training program than was previously included in Chapter 6, thereby ensuring that assessors are uniformly qualified and adequately trained.

There was significant discussion about the proposed language, most notably about the expense of making documentation of assessor training programs available to the public and about perceived redundancy in the proposed language. Referencing the committee's earlier discussion about the value of NELAP accreditation, one committee member stated that the burden of documentation is turning states away from NELAC and suggested that the proposed changes to Chapter 6 just make this worse. He asked what value would be added to the process by, for example, an accrediting authority publishing their assessor training program. In response another committee member pointed out that a lot of the assessment of an accrediting authority occurs through a review of documentation submitted with or supplemental to the application for NELAP recognition. It was suggested that this documentation is part of the accrediting authority's quality system. There was ensuing discussion of where such language should be inserted in Chapter 6.

Mr. Ingersoll suggested that the committee set a deadline for a detailed review of the proposed language changes to Chapter 6 with submission of comments to Ms. Buhl. The committee agreed to submit their comments to Ms. Buhl by Friday, January 12, 2001. Mr. Ingersoll indicated that he would contact the Accrediting Authority (Chapter 6) Committee to let them know that the On-site Assessment Committee will be submitting some language recommendations to ensure that Chapter 6 is consistent

with Chapter 3. Ms. Moore summarized the rationale for the proposed changes. In response to a request from Mr. Ingersoll, she agreed to capture this summary in writing and to distribute it to committee members for their review before submission to the Chapter 6 Committee.

MISCELLANEOUS BUSINESS

Mr. Ingersoll asked for an update on the status of Appendix A, noting that Mr. David Friedman had suggested a possible organization of seven points for a performance standard for an acceptable assessor training course. Ms. Moore stated that she had not yet completed the revision but will try to incorporate Mr. Friedman's language into the Appendix A changes.

Mr. Ingersoll asked committee members whether they had reviewed the three accrediting authority Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) that he had distributed for reference in developing Appendix C. Committee members had not yet reviewed the SOPs. Mr. Ingersoll noted that he should also be receiving SOPs from the states of New York and Florida. Florida is in the process of revising their SOP. He solicited a volunteer to head up a subcommittee on the development of Appendix C. Ms. Mimi Uhlfelder volunteered to chair the subcommittee. Mr. Sotomayor and Mr. Sheibley expressed their commitment to assist Ms. Uhlfelder.

Ms. Moore informed the committee that she had recently used the most current available revision of the assessment checklist based on Chapter 5. She encountered a problem in interpreting the NELAC Standard versus what is on the checklist and suggested that future revisions of the checklist keep to the language of the NELAC Standard as much as possible. Ms. Uhlfelder explained that notes were added to the checklist for supplemental assistance and suggested that she and Mr. Charles Dyer find some way to distinguish between a note and the Standard, itself. Ms. Moore pointed out that some laboratories are not downloading the NELAC Standard. They are downloading the checklist and using it in place of the NELAC Standard. She also pointed out that some laboratories are using the training materials posted on the NELAC Website as an interpretation of the NELAC Standard. She cited these as strong examples of the importance of consistency in language. This led to discussion of the effective date of implementation of the 2000 NELAC Standard, of how long to maintain the Chapter 5 checklist, and of whether it will become necessary to maintain two active checklists. Since the committee's allotted meeting time was drawing to a close, the issue was tabled.

CONCLUSION

The meeting was adjourned as the allotted time for the teleconference expired at 2:30 p.m. EST. The committee's next meeting will be on Wednesday, January 17, 2001, via teleconference.

ACTION ITEMS
ON-SITE ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE MEETING
JANUARY 5, 2001

Item No.	Action	Responsible Member	Date to be Completed
1.	Committee will review revised Appendices B-1 and B-2.	J. Hall to distribute via e-mail	01/17/01
2.	Committee will e-mail requests for clarification on the Chapter 3 changes to Ms. Buhl.	All	01/17/01
3.	Committee will review proposed Chapter 6 changes in detail and e-mail comments to Ms. Buhl.	All	01/12/01
4.	Committee will contact the Accrediting Authority (Chapter 6) Committee to let them know that the On-site Assessment Committee will be submitting some language recommendations to ensure that Chapter 6 is consistent with Chapter 3.	W. Ingersoll (M. Moore will assist by summarizing committee's rationale for recommended changes)	01/12/01
5.	Committee will complete revision of Appendix A, incorporating Mr. Friedman's suggestions for a performance standard for an acceptable assessor training program.	M. Moore	03/14/01
6.	Committee will review three accrediting authority SOPs for on-site assessments for use as a starting point for the development of Appendix C. (SOPs from NY and FL to follow)	All	03/02/01
7.	Appendix C subcommittee coordinate on the development of Appendix C.	M. Uhlfelder (chair) A. Sotomayor R. Sheibley	02/14/01

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ON-SITE ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE MEETING
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